

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF  
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
CONCERNING  
ACCELERATED PAYMENTS FOR EDUCATION BENEFITS  
AND EXPANSION OF THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL**

**MAY 3, 2007**

Chairwoman Herseth, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), we would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record today concerning accelerated payments for education benefits and proposed changes to the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB). It is only appropriate that Congress consider updating one of the most important veterans' benefits ever enacted.

The Global War on Terror has produced a large number of men and women that have served honorably and have since been discharged from the military and become veterans. In the case of many National Guard and Reservists, they may have a career or job to return to. The future for active duty service members leaving the military is not so certain. Many of these men and women plan to use earned MGIB benefits to begin or continue their college education, or pursue other career paths. The expansion of the eligible programs will increase the opportunities for these veterans.

The MGIB has been modified by Congress through the years to increase its value for the veteran and widen the scope of programs it can be used for. As the job market changes, new training programs to accommodate the job market must be available. With improvements to the MGIB, Congress has made it easier for veterans to pursue a traditional college degree. However, we also realize that this traditional path for this benefit may not be the case for many veterans.

The accelerated payment program was enacted in 2003 to address opportunities for veterans in the high tech industry. Intensive courses condensed into a few months offer an excellent opportunity for veterans to be certified in advanced levels of information technology knowledge. In less than the standard 36 months of normal classroom study, a student is ready to enter the work place. Using this accelerated pay initiative for other career programs would give the veteran more options. Using the funds that the veteran partially paid into to obtain training for a career path the veteran has chosen seems to be a reasonable allowance.

Similarly, veterans with significant disabilities and a sufficient work history will qualify for Social Security disability insurance [SSDI]. Such veterans, like anyone on SSDI, will receive a Ticket to Work voucher under Social Security's Ticket to Work program. Using their Ticket, veterans can go to a state vocational rehabilitation agency or a private employment training/counseling provider of their choice [called an Employment Network or EN] and use the services of that agency or provider to obtain a job that will enable them to leave the SSDI benefit rolls. A requirement of the Ticket to Work program, however, is that a Ticket-holder must make “timely progress” toward his or her vocational goal in order for the EN to receive payment from the Social Security Administration. During the first 24 months after placing a Ticket with a provider, the beneficiary is not expected to work but must be actively participating in the employment plan developed with his/her EN.

Perhaps a veteran on SSDI could use accelerated MGIB benefits in tandem with an employment network job training program that would take place during the first 24 months of Ticket program participation. Such an arrangement would also likely make the veteran an appealing client for any Employment Network since the GI bill would be paying the costs of that training rather than the EN itself.

PVA also supports the expansion of MGIB Chapter 30 benefits beyond the scope of the active duty to include National Guard and Reserve service members in an accelerated payment educational plan. Never before has our nation asked so much from this group of service members. It is only right that they should have the same opportunities as many of their full-time active duty counterparts. Some may chose this accelerated payment option for the

MGIB for a career change after their active duty commitment ends. They should not be deprived of this option.

*The Independent Budget* for FY 2008 also includes some discussion about the concept for a Total Force Montgomery GI Bill to match the operational integration of active duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members. Although the Reserve MGIB worked well prior to September 11, 2001, that system does not match up appropriately with the now large and sustained activations of Guard and Reserve units following that time. Congress did attempt to correct this benefit gap by authorizing a Reserve Title 10 MGIB program for Reservist who were mobilized for more than 90 days for a contingency operation; however, funding challenges and difficulty correlating the program to the original benefit and active duty benefits has delayed its implementation.

As stated directly in *The Independent Budget*, “The nation’s total armed forces need a MGIB that supports recruitment and retention, readjustment to civilian life, proportionality of benefits for service rendered, and ease of administration.” With this though in mind, *The Independent Budget* for FY 2008 recommends the creation of the Total Force MGIB.

As explained in *The Independent Budget*, the Total Force MGIB has two broad concepts. The first would allow all active duty and reserve MGIB benefits to be organized in Title 38. The second would allow MGIB benefit levels to be simplified according to the military service performed.

These changes could be best achieved by integrating National Guard and Reserve MGIB benefits with active duty. In accordance with the recommendations of *The Independent Budget*, the benefit rates could then be structured as follows:\

Tier one—similar to the current Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty three-year rate—would be provided to all who enlist in the active armed forces. Service entrants would receive 36 months of benefits at the Active Duty Rate.

Tier two would be for nonprior service direct entry in the Selected Reserve (SELRES) for six years. Benefits would be proportional to the active duty rate. Historically, Selected Reserve Benefits have been 47 to 48 percent of active duty benefits.

Tier three would be for members of the Ready Reserve who are activated for at least 90 days. They would receive one month of benefits for each month of activation, up to a total of 36 months, at the active duty rate.

Finally, the 10-year eligibility period for use of education benefits would apply for active duty service members as well as service members who earn benefits under Tier three mentioned above. A Selected Reserves service member would be eligible to use his or her benefits while still serving in SELRES and for up to 10 years following separation for disability or qualifying retirement.

As Congress increases the training opportunities for the veterans they must insure that new programs meet the approval of State Approving Agencies, (SAAs). SAAs operate through a state's department of education or postsecondary education commission. They review and evaluate, for approval in each state, the programs of education that are offered by educational institutions, including universities, junior colleges, and other VA veterans' educational assistance programs under the Montgomery GI Bill. SAAs also approve employer sponsored on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs.

PVA supports possible changes to the MGIB to broaden the scope of training available by participating in this benefit. Educational benefits are important in assisting the military in recruitment efforts. Those men and women who have chosen to serve our country in uniform deserve every opportunity that is available to train for their next stage in life.

Chairwoman Herseth and members of the Subcommittee, PVA stands ready to assist you in any way to improve education benefits, particularly through the MGIB, for all service members—active duty, National Guard, and Reserves. We look forward to addressing any legislation proposals you might have.

PVA would like to thank the Subcommittee once again for allowing us to submit a statement. We would be happy to receive any questions that you might have.

**Information Required by Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives**

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

***Fiscal Year 2006***

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$244,611 (estimated).

***Fiscal Year 2005***

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$193,019.

Paralyzed Veterans of America Outdoor Recreation Heritage Fund – Department of Defense – \$1,000,000.

***Fiscal Year 2004***

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$246,541.